

Movie Makers

March—April, 2003

Volume 13 No. 2

The American Motion Picture Society

Sponsors of the oldest continuing Film/video Festival in the world.

Why We All Need a Video Club

Walt Gilmore

When I first joined the Los Angeles Cinema Club I was not looking for a social club, but rather for an outlet for my unreleased creative juices. But I have found that the social aspects are more rewarding than any other. First the group is very diverse; members bring knowledge and skills from a wide range of disciplines and experiences. This diversity is not only enjoyable socially but can be a great stimulus to your creative urge. But the best thing about being in a club is the groups mutual interest in videos and the enjoyment of screening them together.

Of course this means an appreciative audience for our work and that is what every videographer needs. There is nothing so disheartening as showing your latest effort to family or friends who can barely stop talking during the showing let alone remember a single frame two seconds after the screening.

But then some of our creations may not be as beautiful in the eyes of others as they are in our own. The reaction of friends and family may be minimal but that may be just an amazingly blunt and accurate criticism. A club screening can be a very good learning experience about how your

video is developing. If you can develop a thick skin to criticism you will gain insight into the way your work is perceived by others; and this reaction can be most enlightening. Seeing the audience response to a five-minute masterpiece of mine at a meeting, showed me that it was in fact a tedious saga, but working from that experience I went back to the edit bench and cut a two-minute, multiple prizewinner. [Pink Lake (2001), AMPS Top Ten, Best Documentary].

The world as we know it is very different today from that in which most of us grew up. One of the

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Movie Makers

Dedicated to the interests of the Serious Motion Picture Maker.

**Vol.13 March—April 2003
No. 2**

MOVIE MAKERS is published bi-monthly on the 25th day of odd-numbered months by the AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY and features news and articles of interest to the serious motion picture maker, video or film.

Membership price per year is \$10.00, Canada \$12.00, foreign addresses \$13.00, all payable in U.S. funds or equivalent. Articles may be copied when the source is given. Back copies are available at .80 cents post paid.

**George W. Cushman
Founder,
1909-1996**

Matt Jenkins, Editor

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Mark your calendar

The combined conven-
tion of AMMA, AMPS
and the TBW will be
held at the Holiday Inn in
sunny Buena Park, CA. on
Oct. 9-11.

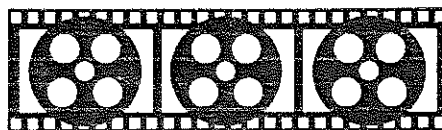
Buena Park is east of Los An-
geles and is located just a few
miles from Disneyland. It has
a multitude of attractions on
its own, such as Knott's Berry
Farm, the Wax Museum, Me-
dieval Times and lots more.

The convention committee is
planning a variety of activities
for attendees and will publish
more details later. Reserve it
on your calendar now though.

CORRECTION

The Michigan Video Movie-
makers entry "Let George Do
It" was mistakenly left out of
the list of American Interna-
tional Film and Video Entrants
published in the September-
October 2002 issue.

Moviemakers regrets the error.



The Film Experience

Ned Cordery

It the recent LA DV
show there was a lot
of discussion about
how to achieve a "film look"
with DV. A new miniDV cam-
era, the Panasonic AG-
DVX100, has manual set-
tings aimed at achieving film
look and shoots at 24fps pro-
gressive scan as well as at
30fps interlaced. There were
presentations by a Director
of Photography who had shot
a feature on a Canon XL1s.
The concentration of the dis-
cussion was on achieving the
image look of film. Although
the appearance of the image
is important there is much
more to it than just that, so
here is what I think is a better
concept, "the Film Experi-
ence", the total effect of
viewing a well made feature
film or short.

The Film Experience com-
prises a number of elements,

1. The image. Typically the
video image is what can be
described as hyper-reality.
Everything is in focus from
front to back, the image is
"hard" and the colors bright
with the edges well defined.
The image is very stable and
there is no variation between
frames as the pixel structure
of the CCDs is fixed. With
film differential focus is used

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TECHNICAL

Jim Beach.

The Curse of DV Revisited - This title to a feature article in one of the many new Video magazines, **Video Systems**, December 2002 intrigued me so, wondering what the curse was, I read the article. The article deals with nuances in the quality of images produced by high-end prosumer camcorders in the \$3000 to \$3500 price range.

Since I, and many of my friends, have and love such cameras, I was anxious to know what terrible shortcoming our pride and joy camcorders have.

Don't be alarmed you probably never noticed the shortcomings, or if you did you were so pleased with the image quality compared to older analog camcorders that they don't bother you.

The article, though very well written, is too technical to be of much interest to any but the perfectionists and the semiprofessionals among us. Some of the recommendations on special filters may be useful but each brand of camera would require experimenting with

variations of the filters.

Here is the opening paragraph of the article: *"THE SKILLED DV SHOOTER KNOWS THE CURSE ALL TOO WELL—the impenetrable blacks, the blown-out highlights, the hard ugly edges around objects. These are a few of the shortcomings we've had to put up with in exchange for the economy and opportunity that DV offers."*

I, and I think most of us except possibly the still photography experts and maybe the 16mm film shooters, do not find these shortcomings a curse. The image quality of DV is so good, the cost so reasonable and instant image viewing so convenient that it is an ideal medium for most of us amateur moviemakers.

Read the article and decide for yourself if you want to play with some of the filters discussed. Maybe they will help you win more contests or just be more satisfied with your latest pride and joy.

The article carries on an interesting discussion of the relative compressions introduced by different codecs from the high 5:1 for our DV25, to 2.2:1 for DigiBeta, to 3:1 for Digital-S (D-9), in cameras ranging upwards of \$10,000.

It is also interesting to note that each manufacturer and even different models interpret the limitations imposed by the compression codec differently in deciding what pixels or groups of pixels to throw out.

This results in nuances of difference in the image produced by different makes of camcorders. To my eye Sony has always had a more pleasing image, Panasonic and Canon a more realistic image even in the analog cameras. Others may see it differently. To confirm this I have run split image comparison tests.

Desk Top Video - This term, popular in 1986 when I first became interested in video editing with my **Amiga 2000** computer, is coming around again for me. I can't get out and shoot new footage away from home and even around home I'm limited by family health challenges. Notice I said challenges not problems. Maybe some of you have the same challenges.

What I, can, do is work at my **Desk Top** so to speak and, try, to make new movies out of footage I already have from travel videos, family videos, and even previous movies I have made.

The Internet is a limitless source for background infor-

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to separate parts of the frame, depth of field is managed to draw the viewer's attention to specific areas. Because of the chemical process used in developing film there is a grain structure that tends to soften the edges and the grain is not identically located in each picture so delivering "liveliness" to the image. There is also the slight unsteadiness of both the recorded and the projected image due to minute imperfections in the mechanical pull down. Film leans to the impressionistic whereas the video image is realistic. The image, film and video, is a product of light and the lighting in feature films is carefully controlled. Many video shoots are overlit and made harsher by the use of open faced lights where diffusion and low light levels will give a more pleasing image. Even outdoors we see the feature film makers using diffuser screens and there is increasing use of light control filters on the camera. For video, on-camera diffuser filters help and Tiffen sell a filter set for DV to help achieve the film look. It is difficult to control depth of field with DV as the system with its small CCDs has an inherently large depth of field. This is best overcome by shooting close in with a wide aperture, the use of heavy neutral density filtration will be necessary to open up the aperture.

2. The camera. Feature films are usually shot very carefully. Camera placement and movement are well thought out and related to the story being told. Camera movement is dictated by what is happening in the frame and the use of Steadicam and tracks ensure smooth moves. Zooms are sparingly used and are usually very subtle. Hand held shots are a special effect and most shots are taken from a stable platform.

3. The picture edit. Most feature films are edited using cuts and very few other transitions. With our present NLE systems we have a palette of effects that are designed for an MTV style of editing. The simplest picture editing NLE will suffice. The discipline of editing cuts only demands a high level of skill from the editor to make sure the edit appears to be seamless. The relationship between color matching/contrast, eyelines, screen direction of movement, position in the frame, camera movement/position, lighting, etc. must be carefully devised at the out and in points between shots. Pacing and rhythm are matched to the action or may be used in counterpoint. The film look, the appearance of the image, may be achieved in post production and there are a number of plug-in software programs and methods for adjusting the image appearance in edit programs. The

best and usually most expensive can deliver excellent results others produce images that are film look only in the imagination of their creators.

4. The sound. It is possible to get away with less than perfect images, watch TV any day of the week, but impossible to get away with less than perfect sound. This is the area where many amateur films fail. The sound is built up with many layers that have to be related to each other and to the image yet not overwhelm it. A wonderful description of the role of sound in film is that the image provides the information and the sound delivers the emotion. A simple sound track will be mixed from four elements; sync sound, ambient sound, spot effects and music. Sync dialog must be clearly heard and also have perspective related to the position of the speaker in the frame. Ambient sound helps to define the locale of the scene, how often we see settings where the ambient sound has been either reduced or eliminated to the point where the actors seem to be speaking in a sound studio. If they are, then a recording of the original ambient sound laid in will lift the scene. Spot effects are used to achieve a specific emphasis or replace a natural sound that was unconvincing. Music, here we can make or break a production,

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main differences I notice is that we, as a society, are more isolated and self-involved. This is, I am afraid, a very bad thing for videographers and other producers of visual communications. In this realm the situation may be a product of the "auteur" theory of filmmaking. By concentrating total control of a film to one individual, and usually an individual who is self motivated, self important, and self involved (otherwise they would not be in that position in the first place) the results are often self indulgent and lack the basic requirement of all art -- creativity and rapport with the audience. In the case of some commercial filmmakers who have been given so much "freedom;" the results too often are films, which are adolescent fantasies and/or memories of old movies, rather than involving stories based in real life experience and emotions.

And the same situation affects the amateur videographer. While the box office will eventually force change to the commercial market, belonging to a video club can serve the same, important influence on developing a videographer's work as well as a great motivation for completing the project.

Besides providing the op-

portunity for members to exchange information and experiences, a video club is an educational tool for all members from the most advanced to the newest novice. All clubs provide demonstrations, discussions, classes and or workshops on all the various facets of video making. To the novice this helps them to learn how to start their work; for the advanced members this helps them to pick up new methods of working as well as reminding them of techniques they can use to modify current and future projects. And there is nothing like teaching another to sharpen one's own techniques and skills.

Most clubs have regular contests and projects for members to work on. A deadline and a competitive challenge is a definite motivation to get a project off the ground or out of our minds and onto video. I am sure that everyone reading this has a long list of ideas they have never begun or have begun and then set aside never to start again. A contest is a great reason to get started and the deadline is a great motivation to keep you going.

If you are uninspired to start any project, often a theme contest will create an artistic spark to ignite your creative juices. A theme contest is one in which the entry must be of a certain

music video, a silent story, or a video including 3 items from a list, etc. Other contests might be on assigned subjects like: My Saturday, In My Backyard, A Local Character, An Historic Event in My Town, Light and Color or even Light and Shadow.

The friendly competition of club contests is a great motivator as well, because no one wants to be left out of the competition and the work of others can give you a challenge to make a better version or give you an idea to overcome a problem that has been stopping you from making a video from your own original idea.

So here are the reasons everyone should belong to a video club, 1) social interaction with a group of interesting, active and creative people; 2) the occasional exchange information and ideas with others interested in visual communication, photography (all media) and performance art; 3) the opportunity to learn from others' experience and from classes and demonstrations; 4) motivation to create and complete projects; 5) competition to measure the quality of your work and, perhaps the most important, 6) an audience.



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mation and even scenes and stills. My computer (PC) has several programs for enhancing or painting still images and I have two programs, Adobe 6.0 and Media Studio Pro, which are capable of doing the same with video if I ever learn how to run them.

My Casablanca Kron non-linear editing system is an easy to use and very capable editing system with a number of special effects but so far it does not have a paint program.

I recently acquired PC Link, which lets me send images or multiple images (video) files back and forth to and from the PC.

So, now **Desk Top Video** is born again for me and far better than the desk top video I was able to do with my old Amiga and a VHS VCR. The only thing is, can I make a movie that will be interesting to others or just have fun playing with my toys?

Either way is fine. I hope to make a movie out of nothing but in any event I'm having fun trying.

In and around home I can set up scenes and perhaps some action. Maybe this coming spring some birds will decide to start a family and I can record their progress.

My great grandson pays me a visit occasionally and I hope to get a few scenes with him to add to the short movie "See What I See" that I made last year. Only trouble is, he is almost three and last year he was not yet two. That reminds me I have the little spy camera I used mounted on his cap for that movie. Maybe I can find a new use for it.

As you can tell I am rambling here so let me talk about DVD again. I told you last time that I now have both a DVD burner and a DVD player. We have been watching a few rental DVD movies lately and I really believe they are noticeably much better, visually and aurally, than the usual VHS rentals and even better than the image quality our home made S-VHS movies.

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use with care. Music plays directly to the emotions and produces a very rapid response it can be boring as well as uplifting, frightening or lyrical. Watch some of those great movies with the sound turned off and the absence of the music will remove much of the excitement or emotion. There are many times when the dialog or ambient sound will carry the scene but there are times when music is essential. If you know a composer or compose yourself then it is possible to match the music to the image rather

then the other way round. Devote lots of time to music selection and test the music with the image, NLE makes it so much easier to experiment. The final sound mix will probably require software with a greater technical capability than the picture editing software.

So, in my opinion the "Film Experience" is different to the documentary, music video, and travelogue experience even though they may be shot on film. The Film Experience plays to the emotions in a subtle style, it is not the gun and run approach of many DV productions shot available light with just ambient sound and the out of focus shots left in. They have their place and DV has made possible many productions that otherwise would not be made but it also has the potential to deliver fine images and sound and give the audience a true "Film Experience".

The Danish director Lars von Trier came up with rules for a style that runs counter to the traditional feature film production methods, this is called Dogme 95 and the details are at www.dogme95.dk. Basically, storytelling by the gun and run approach. Now for an approach to DV production that follows well tried film making practices "the DVFE" (the Digital Video Film Experience), I will try to come up with a set of rules! However as we embark on our

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Social
Motivation
Competition
Exchange of ideas
Education

What I learned in the studio

Pros work from a script, an idea of a perfect film. Everybody then tries to physically to create that ideal on film. Everybody's ideal is different.

As amateurs we have no one to reinterpret our ideal video. We have no one to help create the video.

Restrictions require creativity to overcome. We also generally do not start with a script but work from scenes shot as they occur naturally then we have to arrange the shots to create a script or video.

All videos need a story – it may be a story like ...this is how to make ice cream (specific), ...this is what the city of XXXX is like (a more general concept), A point of view – (a theme) ...this is a beautiful (exciting, cold, hot, colorful, etc.) place, or ...this

is how we spent our day. Consistency, in all elements but with variations for pacing and build, plus the other technical aspects of sound, narration, music, photography. Pacing, rhythm, and build. A Climax.

www.angelfire.com/movies/amps

A NOTE FROM THE SECRETARY

We have strived to keep our membership cost as low as possible, to just cover our expenses. You will note the expiration date of your membership on the mailing label of this issue. If your dues are about to expire, it would be appreciated if you would submit your dues promptly. The address is on pg 2.

Thanks to all of you who have contributed articles to Movie Makers. We welcome your ideas and suggestions and love your assistance!

Roger Garretson, Secty/Treas

Festival Information

Close Date	Festival name and address for forms		Open to	Subject	Format	Time Limit	Entry Fee	Award	Show Dates
June 1, 2003	Cotswold Int'l Film & Video Festival England Visit www.cotswoldfilmvideofest.co.uk		ABCDE	G	NTSC- K PAL-MNQR Film-HJ	20min AB 25min C	\$12 A \$ 7 B \$18 C	VU	Sept 5-6 2003
May 31, 2003	Guernsey Int'l Film/Video Festival, Isle of Guernsey, Great Britain E-mail: landjoz@guernsey.net Or rgaretson@aol.com in USA		ABCD	G	Film-HJ PAL only KMN	30min	£7	VWU	Oct 3-5 2003
June 15, 2003	Canadian Int'l Annual Film/Video Festival (CIAFF) Entries forms are only available at www.ciaff.org		ABCD	G	K (NTSC only)	30 min	\$20 A \$40 D \$25 BC	VW	
A Amateur B College C Grade 1-12		D Independent E Professional F Restricted	G Open	H S8 J 16mm K VHS M SVHS	N Mini DV O other	S Regional T Exceptions U Cash V Trophies	W Certificates X Other Award		Y Members Z Non Members

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first production made for the DVFE we see the AMPS time limit for the Festival is 15 minutes and we are looking at a mini-feature. Ah well, we'll enter the trailer.

But however we shoot and edit there is no substitute for what my old colleague Stuart Rumens calls a "rattling good yarn." My thanks to Albert Noble for providing thought provoking suggestions and comments, to Michael and Krish, top end editors, for giving me bed and board during the LA DV show, to Alberto for cinematography extraordinaire and music to match.



From:
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APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP AMERICAN MOTION PICTURE SOCIETY

I Would like to Join the Society:

Dues USA: (includes - Movie Maker) \$ 10.00

Dues Canada: (includes - Movie Maker) \$ 12.00

Dues-Foreign: (includes - Movie Maker) \$13.00

Enclosed _____

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP: _____

E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

Mail to: AMPS, 30 Kanan Rd., Oak Park, CA 91377-1105

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